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APPLICATION FOR UNITED STATES PATENT

Applicants: Ronald D. Ringleben and Ian Pratt

Title: ROBOTIC RESERVOIR WITHOUT LIQUID HANGUP

Assignee: Nalge Nunc International Corporation

SPECIFICATION

Kristi L. Davidson, Esq.
Wood, Herron & Evans, L.L.P.
2700 Carew Tower
441 Vine Street
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202
(513) 241-2324 (voice)
(513) 421-7269 (facsimile)
Ref. No.: NAC-108

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ROBOTIC RESERVOIR WITHOUT LIQUID HANGUP

Field of the Invention

This invention relates to a reservoir for containing reagent to be extracted and pipetted into multi-well test plates.

Background of the Invention

Multi-well test plates are well known in scientific areas, such as

5 biotechnology, for allowing the detection and measurement of substances present in translucent liquid samples. Generally, this is accomplished by measuring the light absorbence characteristics of the sample through one or more spectroscopy procedures. Typically, a framework of test wells is opened at the top for receiving the liquid samples, and is closed with a transparent bottom for allowing light radiation penetration

10 in a wavelength region necessary for a particular study. These studies, commonly referred to as assays, may include drug concentration assays, drug metabolite assays, enzyme activity assays, enzyme cofactor assays, fluorescent probe excitations or emissions, DNA spectral shifts or DNA and protein concentration measurements, as well as many other studies. The well plates typically consist of a plurality of individual

1 wells configured so that an aliquot of a sample may be placed within each well. The
wells are typically arranged in relatively close proximity in a matrix pattern, allowing
samples to be studied individually or as a group. Common sizes for microplates include
matrices having dimensions of 4 x 6 (24 wells), 8 x 12 (96 wells), or 16 x 24 (384
5 wells), although larger well plates are also used that may include matrices of hundreds
or even thousands of wells.

Prior to filling the well plates with reagent for carrying out the desired
reaction and/or tests, a desired quantity of reagent is measured out into a reservoir. For
example, if each well in a 96 well plate needs 1 milliliter of reagent for carrying out the
10 measurement or reaction, a minimum of 96 milliliters of reagent is needed in the
reservoir. A multiple head pipettor, in this case a 96 well pipettor head format, is used
to extract the reagent for filling of the 96 wells. However, flat bottomed reservoirs or
patterned bottoms with raised flat areas result in liquid hangup such that a portion of the
liquid reagent is not positioned to be extracted into one of the heads of the multiple head
15 pipettor. Thus, an additional amount of reagent is required to be added to the reservoir
to account for the fact that some reagent will be wasted due to the design of the
reservoir bottom. The reagents used for many of the assays are very expensive or
precious, such that even small amounts of waste are unacceptable.

There is thus a need to provide a reagent reservoir and method for liquid
20 reagent extraction that allows for full extraction of the liquid reagent therein by a
multiple head pipettor.

Summary of the Invention

The present invention provides a reagent reservoir with a patterned
bottom that allows full extraction of a liquid reagent by a multiple head pipettor, and a
25 method of using the reservoir. To this end, and in accordance with the present

invention, the reservoir is provided having side walls and a bottom wall for containing the liquid reagent, wherein the bottom wall includes a plurality of recesses, each corresponding to a head of the multiple head pipettor. Each recess opens upwardly to receive the pipettor head, and includes a top edge, a bottom and surrounding side wall portions that angle outwardly from the recess bottom to the top edge. The recesses promote flow of the liquid reagent to the recess bottoms and prevent liquid hangup between recesses to eliminate waste of the liquid reagent. In one exemplary embodiment of the present invention, the surrounding side wall portions include four connected substantially triangular surfaces that angle outwardly from the recess bottom.

In another exemplary embodiment of the present invention, the top edges between adjacent recesses meet at an angle to form a pointed peak. In using the reservoir, the interior of the reagent reservoir is filled with a desired volume of liquid reagent, the pipettor is positioned such that each pipettor head is aligned with a respective recess bottom, and the reagent is extracted. By virtue of the patterned bottom, substantially complete to full extraction of the reagent may be achieved.

Brief Description of the Drawings

The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated in and constitute a part of this specification, illustrate embodiments of the invention and, together with a general description of the invention given above, and the detailed description given below, serve to explain one illustrative embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a reagent reservoir of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a cross-sectional view along line 2-2 of FIG. 1, further depicting a multiple head pipettor positioned to extract liquid reagent from the reservoir of the present invention; and

FIG. 3 is an enlarged view of area 3 of FIG. 2 depicting a recess in the patterned bottom of the reservoir of the present invention.

Detailed Description

Referring to FIGS. 1-3, a reagent reservoir 10 constructed in accordance with one exemplary embodiment of the invention generally comprises a plurality of side walls 12 and a bottom wall 14, which collectively define an interior for containing a liquid reagent. The reagent reservoir 10 is preferably formed from a polymer, such as polypropylene or polystyrene, and is preferably opaque. The reagent reservoir 10 depicted in FIG. 1 includes measuring indicia 16 to enable accurate measurement of a quantity of liquid reagent therein. Specifically, the reservoir depicted in FIG. 1 allows for accurate measurement of up to 300 milliliters of liquid reagent. It is to be understood, however, that the depth of the reservoir 10 may be lesser or greater than that depicted, depending on the needs of the particular experiments or assays to be conducted.

Bottom wall 14 includes a plurality of recesses 20 into which the liquid reagent settles upon being measured into the reagent reservoir 10. Each recess 20 opens upwardly to receive one of the heads 30 of a multiple head pipettor 32, as depicted in FIG. 2. The particular embodiment depicted in FIGS. 1-3 includes a bottom wall 14 having 96 recesses 20, each recess 20 opening upwardly to receive one of the 96 heads 30 of a 96 well pipettor head format. It should be understood, however, that the reagent reservoir 10 of the present invention may contain any number of recesses 20 to correspond to different pipettor head formats. For example, pipettor head formats are provided for 384 well test plates, 1,536 well test plates, and so forth.

Each recess 20 includes a bottom 22 and surrounding side wall portions 24 that angle outwardly from the bottom 22 to a top edge 26. The surrounding side wall

portions 24 angle outwardly to the top edge 26 that either meets at an angle with a side wall 12 of the reservoir 10 or with a top edge 26 of an adjacent recess 20. The top edge 26 between adjacent recesses 20 advantageously forms a pointed peak which prevents liquid hangup between recesses 20. Alternatively, top edge 26 could be rounded. The liquid reagent is caused to flow downwardly to the recess bottoms 22 where the liquid reagent may be fully extracted by a respective head 30 of the multiple head pipettor 32, as depicted most clearly in FIG. 2. The prevention of liquid reagent hangup becomes important when the level of reagent in the reagent reservoir falls below the level of the top edges 26 of recesses 20.

As best shown in FIG. 1, each recess 20 may include a circular bottom 22, corresponding to the circular geometry of the heads 30 of the multiple head pipettor 32. To eliminate flat portions within the bottom wall 14 of the reservoir 10 that can cause liquid hangup, the recesses 20 may include surrounding side wall portions 24 comprising four connected substantially triangular surfaces 24a-d angling outwardly to the top edge 26. Top edge 26 would thus have a square or rectangular geometry defining the opening of recess 20. Recesses 20, in this embodiment, would thereby have an inverted pyramid-like configuration, such that no flat areas comprise the bottom wall 14, except for the bottom 22 of each recess 20. Bottoms 22, however, are not limited to flat surfaces. Top edges 26 between recesses 20 preferably meet in a peak, but could be rounded. In this embodiment, reagent is forced to flow down side walls 24 toward bottoms 22, and no liquid hangup can occur on top edges 26. Moreover, by virtue of including a plurality of such recesses 20 corresponding to the number of heads 30 in the pipettor 32, the liquid reagent is concentrated within the bottom wall 14 at the exact locations where the heads 30 will be positioned for extraction, ensuring that no reagent is wasted between adjacent pipettor heads 30.

In the embodiment shown in FIGS. 1-3, the reagent reservoir 10 includes a plurality of baffles 34 positioned between rows of recesses 20. These baffles 34 are optional, but when included, reduce splashing of the liquid reagent during filling, particularly for low volumes of reagent. The baffles preferably include an angled top portion 36 to further prevent liquid hangup within the interior of reservoir 10.

In use, the reagent reservoir 10 is filled with a desired volume of liquid reagent. Multiple head pipettor 32 is positioned, for example as shown in FIG. 2, with each pipettor head 30 aligned over a respective recess bottom 22. The liquid reagent is then extracted. The extraction may continue until all or substantially all of the liquid reagent is removed from the interior of the reagent reservoir 10. By virtue of the angled pattern of the bottom wall 14, the liquid reagent is caused to flow toward the recess bottoms 22 thereby enabling the complete or nearly complete extraction.

While the present invention has been illustrated by the description of embodiments thereof, and while the embodiments have been described in considerable detail, they are not intended to restrict or in any way limit the scope of the appended claims to such detail. Additional advantages and modifications will readily appear to those skilled in the art. The invention in its broader aspects is therefore not limited to the specific details, representative apparatus and method and illustrative examples shown and described. Accordingly, departures may be made from such details without departing from the scope or spirit of applicant's general inventive concept.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS: